

Trauma Number One Killer of Gallatin County's Youngest

Traumatic injuries, or those caused by an external force on the body, kill and injure more of Gallatin County's residents ages 1-44 than any other factor. Between August, 2007, and July, 2008, Bozeman Deaconess Hospital's trauma registry reported 185 injuries – nearly one every two days – and nine deaths. The top three causes included motor vehicle crashes, falls and suicide.

Injuries from trauma are expensive, often require long recovery and for every death, up to 10 injured from trauma are permanently disabled.

Like the other major causes of death being examined by the Gallatin City-County Health Department's Prevention Alliance, trauma prevention saves lives and helps our statistically healthiest residents thrive and reach their collective potential. And thanks to the hard work of several disparate organizations in our area, primary and secondary prevention efforts are well underway.

Motor Vehicle Crashes (MVCs): The most dangerous thing most of us do every day is get into our vehicles. In 2005, 43,200 Americans died and hundreds of thousands were injured from MVCs, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Our local emergency service providers respond to multiple crashes in the county daily, with seat belt use being the main factor affecting survival rates.

In two areas prone to MVCs, US Highway 191 from Four Corners to Big Sky and Interstate 90 in the Bozeman Pass, recent primary prevention tools have been working to reduce crashes. On Highway 191, improvements slated by the Montana Department of Transportation have included adding turn lanes for Highway 64 going to Big Sky, slope flattening, widening of shoulders, improving clear zones, improving site distance, installing new and upgraded guardrails, and replacing two bridges. Construction will continue into 2009. On I-90, the local environmental organization, American Wildlands, has spearheaded a campaign – Safe Passages - to reduce vehicle/wild animal collisions. More than 1,200 animals were killed in the Pass between 2001-2005, but thanks to new fencing and other efforts, animals now can have a safe passage through the area.

Additionally, our local Safe Kids Safe Communities (SKSC) program sponsored by Child Care Connections, has brought together a coalition of law enforcement, fire departments, emergency medical service providers, Bozeman Public Schools, healthcare groups and others to provide car seat fittings and installation clinics.

Falls: This category encompasses a wide variety of injuries from bicycles, skateboards and snowboards to accidental falls at home. One of the best preventative measures to reduce injuries in falls is wearing a helmet. Motorcyclists, bicyclists, snow sport enthusiasts and many others can benefit from wearing a properly-fitted helmet. Safe Kids Safe Communities routinely makes helmets available through booths at events and through their "Laugh and Play family Day" in April. The city of Bozeman has been adding bike lanes to several miles of city streets to help give both motorists and bikes better delineation and to reduce crashes.

Suicide: While another in this series of guest editorials is addressing suicide directly, Gallatin County has well-positioned resources in place to help assist those

considering suicide. The HELP Center offers a local 24-hour hotline (586-3333) and SKSC in partnership with Bozeman Public Schools and others recently has made free gun locks available to reduce accidental traumatic injury from guns. The Greater Gallatin United Way offers after school programs across the county, while Big Brothers/Big Sisters and THRIVE provide adult interaction and mentoring to children at risk.

Trauma is both deadly and expensive. And as a community, we cannot afford it. Wear your seatbelt. Buy (and use!) a helmet. Together we can make a difference.